

Ideological Purge: DOGE's Federal Layoffs Especially Target Agencies Perceived as Liberal

This bears the hallmark of an authoritarian state.



by **Mihai Andrei**

The so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is undertaking a destructive and [seemingly arbitrary purge](#) of federal agencies and workers. But a new analysis reveals a stark reality: layoffs in the federal workforce are not just about budgets — they're about ideology.

An analysis by Adam Bonica, a political scientist at Stanford University, presents compelling evidence that U.S. federal agencies perceived as more liberal are significantly more likely to face layoffs, supporting claims that DOGE is driven by ideology, not pragmatism.

Agencies perceived as liberal are more likely to be targeted by DOGE. Credits: Adam Bonica. To say that DOGE is controversial would be an understatement. The “department” is not actually a department but rather [an organization contracted by Donald Trump](#). Trump says [Elon Musk is running it](#), but the [White House's lawyers say](#) Elon Musk isn't running anything. At any rate, DOGE, whose staff includes [a 19-year-old who calls himself “Big Balls”](#) has been firing a lot of people.

They've fired some of the [country's best researchers](#), they've fired nuclear experts (and then couldn't [find and rehire them](#)), they've even “accidentally” fired people monitoring [avian flu](#). They've fired some of the government's [best-performing workers](#) and they're trying to dismantle some of the [country's key agencies](#), including some that [make a lot of money](#) for US taxpayers.

Many feel this indiscriminate [approach is intentional](#) and not just a sign of incompetence but rather, has a particular intent. Bonica seems to support that idea.

Not coincidence but targeting

Bonica spotted a trend. Federal agencies perceived as liberal-leaning are experiencing a higher rate of layoffs compared to their conservative counterparts. Bonica's research, which surveyed over 1,500 federal executives, mapped agencies based on their perceived ideological stance and examined the correlation with recent layoffs.

Although agencies perceived as more conservative are not always spared, they are far more likely to escape DOGE's wrath.

“The DOGE firings have nothing to do with ‘efficiency’ or ‘cutting waste.’ They’re a direct push to weaken federal agencies perceived as liberal. This was evident from the start, and now the data confirms it: targeted agencies overwhelmingly those seen as more left-leaning,” writes Bonica on BlueSky. Other factors don't seem to matter that much.

“Agency size didn't matter — larger agencies aren't more likely to be facing firings/layoffs. Bigger budgets made firings/layoffs slightly more likely, but the effect was modest.”

Agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Education, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) have seen significant reductions in their workforce, regardless of how they perform. These departments, traditionally associated with progressive policies, are now facing massive operational challenges due to the abrupt loss of personnel.

An authoritarian move

This could be more than just a purely political move. The centralized and unilateral decision-making process exhibited by DOGE has raised alarms about authoritarian practices within the federal government. The rapid implementation of mass layoffs, often without comprehensive reviews or adherence to established protocols, undermines the foundational principles of transparency and accountability in public administration and makes it easier to bypass democratic mechanisms — especially in the federal mechanism.

“Why does this matter? Because the civil service is where much of regulatory policy actually gets made and enforced. You can pass a law, but if the agency responsible for enforcing it is gutted, that law loses its teeth,” writes Bonica.

“Authoritarians often disguise political purges as ‘cost-cutting’ or ‘efficiency’ measures. They claim the purges about streamlining government but are done to consolidate power. This is what’s happening now. And it’s only the start.”

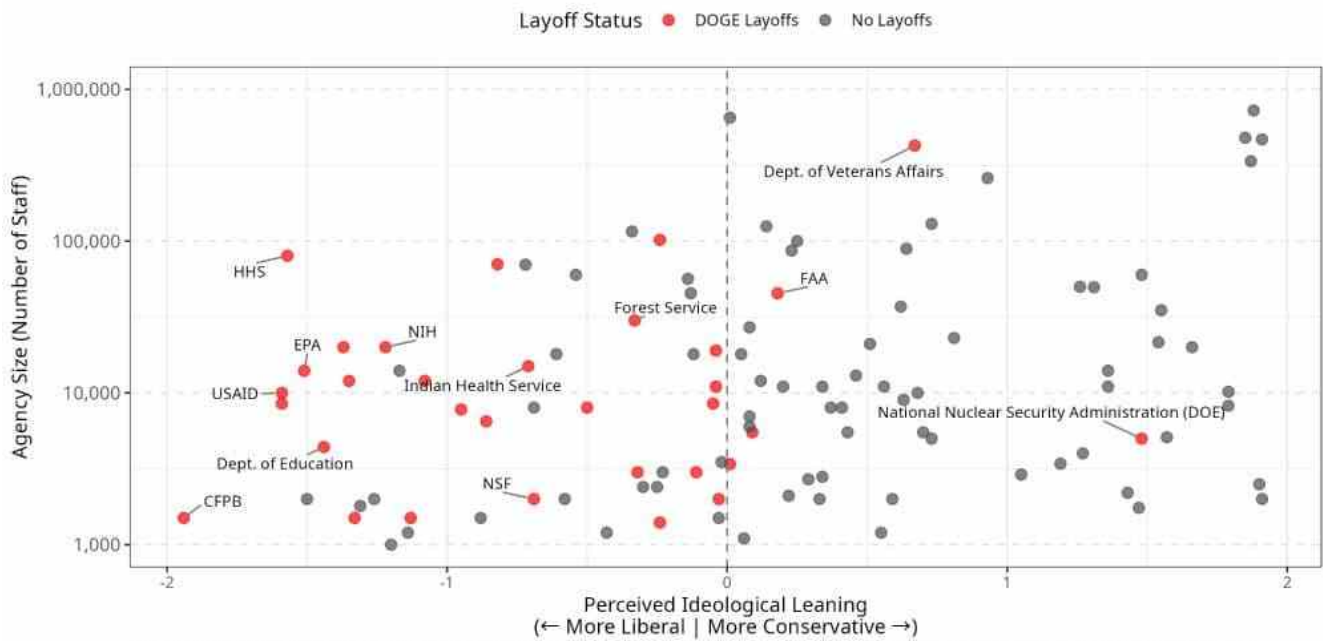
The targeted layoffs have far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate loss of jobs. The EPA’s reduced capacity hampers environmental regulation and enforcement, potentially leading to increased pollution and public health risks. Cuts at the Department of Education threaten the support systems for public schools and educational research, while reductions at the NIH impede critical medical research initiatives.

Moreover, the manner in which these layoffs are being conducted — marked by abrupt terminations and a lack of due process — has eroded morale within the federal workforce. Employees express feelings of betrayal and fear, as decades of public service are dismissed without consideration.

This atmosphere of intimidation serves to stifle dissent and discourage the pursuit of public good, hallmarks of an authoritarian regime.

Empirical Evidence of Ideological Targeting in Federal Layoffs

Agencies seen as liberal are significantly more likely to face DOGE layoffs.



Note: Analysis includes only agencies with 500+ staff members. Ideology estimates are based on survey responses from 1,500+ federal executives rating agencies' policy views as liberal to conservative across both Democratic and Republican administrations.
Source: Richardson, Clinton, & Lewis (2018). Elite Perceptions of Agency Ideology and Workforce Skill. *The Journal of Politics* 80(1).